

10 July 1983

ARTICLE APPEARED
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'Insinuations'

Soviets deny link to papal shooting

MOSCOW — The Soviet Union yesterday dismissed as "absurd insinuations" the first public allegations by Turkish terrorist Mehmet Ali Agca that Soviet and Bulgarian secret agents helped him in a plot to kill Pope John Paul II.

The new allegations were intended to divert attention from the true organizers and inspirers of acts of terrorism, who are closely linked with neo-fascist circles and the American CIA, the Soviet news agency Tass said.

Agca, in a surprise encounter Friday with reporters outside police headquarters in Rome, alleged publicly for the first time that the Soviet KGB and Bulgarian secret service were behind his attempt to assassinate the Pope on May 13, 1981.

Agca, 24, also linked three Bulgarian suspects to the plot and said he had proof of every action.

He was taken to Rome from Ascoli Piceno prison in northern Italy so that authorities could question him in connection with the disappearance of Emanuela Orlandi, 15, the daughter of a Vatican employee, on June 22. Her kidnappers have demanded Agca's freedom.

Tass said that investigations and evidence proved that alleged links between Agca and Socialist countries were "nothing more than absurd insinuations."

"There are absolutely no facts to bear out, directly or indirectly, the Socialist countries complicity in the heinous crime," Tass said.

On Friday, Agca firmly responded, "Yes, the KGB," when a television reporter asked him whether the Soviet Union's secret service was behind the papal shooting in St. Peter's Square.

Agca's statements added weight to allegations by Italian investigators that Bulgarian secret agents were involved in the attack. The Bulgarians have repeatedly denied the allegations.

In remarks from the meeting broadcast later on national television, the slim, unshaven Agca clearly pointed to the KGB and Bulgarian secret agents as having helped him carry out the assassination attempt.

Agca's allegations followed widespread speculation in the Western media that the Soviet Union wanted to eliminate the Polish-born pontiff because of his strong support for Poland's now-outlawed Solidarity trade union. The Soviets have called the speculation absurd.

Agca offered no proof to back up his allegations.

During his trial in July 1981, Agca maintained that he acted alone. However, news reports have said he later confessed that he had several accomplices, including at least one with him in St. Peter's Square on the day he shot the Pope.

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